DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 410 330 UD 031 820

AUTHOR Pozzi, Carlos
TITLE Delinquency and Acculturation: Differences across Generations of Latino Adolescents.
PUB DATE [97]
NOTE 15p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Acculturation; *Adolescents; Age Differences; *Cultural Differences; *Delinquency; *Generation Gap; *Hispanic Americans; Parent Child Relationship; Sex Differences; Socioeconomic Status; Violence
IDENTIFIERS *Latinos

ABSTRACT

This study explores the interaction between acculturation and socioeconomic status across generations of Latino families with adolescent children. Also studied are the implications for the adolescent's involvement in delinquent behavior, both violent and nonviolent. Researchers hypothesized that an elevated level of delinquency in Latino adolescents is in part affected by the different levels of acculturation between the adolescent and his or her parents. Differences between the scores on an acculturation scale for the head of the household and the adolescent are compared to the adolescent's self-reported involvement in delinquent behavior described on a scale developed for the study. A sample of 80 Latino families was used, controlling for socioeconomic status, gender, age, and nation of origin. Results show no significant correlation between the level of delinquency and cultural disparity across generations. Males did tend to score significantly higher on the delinquency scale than females did, but this finding was expected. Implications for prevention of delinquent behavior are discussed, and suggestions are provided for further research. (Contains 13 references.) (Author/SLD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 410 330

Delinquency and Acculturation: Differences across Generations of Latino Adolescents

Carlos Pozzi

Wheaton College

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Carlos Pozzi

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

UD031520

The present study explores the interaction between acculturation and socio-economic status across generations of Latino families with adolescent children and the implications for the adolescent's involvement in delinquent behavior, both violent and nonviolent. The researchers hypothesized that an elevated level of delinquency in Latino adolescents is in part affected by the different levels of acculturation between the adolescent and their parents. Differences between the scores on an acculturation scale of the head of household and the adolescent are compared to the adolescent's self-reported involvement in delinquent behavior for 80 Latino families with adolescent children, controlling for socio-economic status, gender, age, and nation of origin. The results indicate implications for prevention and suggestions for further research.

The literature suggests that Latino adolescents engage in delinquent behavior at a rate significantly higher than that of other adolescents and that the difference in levels of acculturation across generations may influence this behavior.

The Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority(1990) reported the following four relevant statistics: 1) in 1990 Latinos accounted for 9.8% of the high school population in Illinois; however, they made up 43% of dropouts; 2) Latinos are twice as likely to become offenders in gang-related crimes as African Americans and three times as likely as whites; 3) Although Latinos make up 9% of the United States population, they represent 13% of male prison inmates and 12% of female prison inmates; 4) nineteen percent of juvenile inmates in federally operated facilities are Latinos.

Additionally, after reviewing police files on gang violence in Los Angeles and Chicago, Block (1991) argued that street gang violence has remained a greater problem among Latinos than among African Americans. He found that of all homicides committed in these areas from 1982 to 1989, 40% of Latino offenders committed the crime as part of a gang confrontation, compared to 12% of whites and African Americans. He also argued that Latino males are at greater risk of committing murder in gang-related crimes at an earlier age than whites or African Americans.

The Relationship Between Delinquency and Acculturation

The available research suggests a relationship between acculturation and delinquency; however the nature of the

relationship is still unclear. Two large-scale surveys of Mexican Americans in the United States published by Amaro, Whitaker, Coffman, and Heeren (1988) found that more acculturated individuals reported higher levels of marijuana and cocaine use than did less acculturated immigrants.

Furthermore, Barrett, Joe, and Simpson (1991) studied the association between the acculturation process and drug and alcohol use. They found a significant difference between the youth and their mothers in the language preference scales, and a significant correlation of the Crime Severity Index with acculturation measures. Their research suggested an association of language preference favoring Spanish and Spanish spoken at home with lower levels of criminality. They concluded that youth less acculturated as evidenced by their greater preference for Spanish, tended to engage in less criminal behavior.

Also Buriel, Calzada, and Vazquez (1982) studied the relationship between acculturation and delinquency across generations and found that third generation subjects reported higher delinquency rates than either first or second generation Mexican American subjects.

In their study of 1077 Puerto Rican youth in the south Bronx, Sommers, Fagan and Baskin (1993) concluded that acculturation was positively associated with participation in interpersonal violence and theft, but lower acculturation was related to participation in illicit drug use. They also found that Familism, a measure of individual's expressed concern over

family values rather than individual opportunities, was a consistent and direct contributor to the avoidance of deviance.

As mentioned above, acculturation and its impact on families, influence behavior, and specifically the behavior of adolescents. However, the exact nature of this influence is unknown. The researchers believe that Latino adolescents experience a greater stress in family life as a result of the differences in levels of acculturation among family members, especially differences between acculturation, levels of parents and children. It is this added level of stress that influences the adolescent's involvement in delinquent behavior.

Four major groups make up the Latino population of the United States: Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Central and South Americans. The two largest of these groups are Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans. These two groups tend to be separated geographically; Puerto Ricans tend to settle in the Eastern and Northeastern parts of the country, while Mexican Americans tend to settle in the South and Midwest. Cuban Americans, the third largest Latino group in the United States, tend to concentrate in the Southeastern portion of the country.

The present study explores the correlation between cultural disparity (differences between parent's and child's level of acculturation) and the adolescent's self reported involvement in delinquent behavior. Specifically, the study set out to answer the following research questions 1) Is there a correlation between the adolescent Latinos' level of acculturation and that

of his or her parents? 2) Is there a correlation between the adolescent's level of acculturation and involvement in delinquent behavior?

Method

Subjects

The sample consisted of 80 Latino adolescents (46 males, 34 females), ages 13-17, born in the United States or living in the United States before age ten and having at least one parent who was Latino and born outside the United States. Forty five subjects were Puerto Ricans (26 males, 19 females), 17 were Mexican Americans (10 males, 7 females), 4 were Cubans (3 males, 1 female), and 14 were from Central or South America (7 males, 7 females). Forty four subjects were in the younger age group (12-15) and 36 were in the older age group, (16-18).

The sample was randomly selected from two sources: a list of hospital and social service agency employees and a list of participants in different community activities and schools in Chicago.

Instruments

The research employed four instruments, a questionnaire, a demographic form, the Marin acculturation scale and a self report scale.

Questionnaire

This was designed to obtain information regarding the demographics of each subject. Participants were asked about their place of birth, years in the United States, age, sex, and

academic standing. The information was obtained for the parent and the adolescent.

The Marin Acculturation Scale

This Liket-style scale provided a short and reliable way of measuring acculturation (alpha coefficient of .92) and a high positive correlation with other items used to measure acculturation such as subject's generation, proportion of time living in the United States and subject's own evaluation of her or his acculturation level. The scale awards a score of 1 for Spanish only to a score of five for English only answers on each item. A score of 60, the maximum score on the acculturation scale, represents full acculturation while a score of 12, the lowest possible score, represents no acculturation. A score of 36 on this scale represents a balance in acculturation. A person with this score has accepted Anglo cultural values but maintained her or his culture of origin.

The Self Report Scale

This was designed specifically for the study. It elicited information about the adolescent's involvement in behavior that is delinquent in nature. The scores range from 1 for an answer of "never" to 5 for an answer of "more than 10 times." Responses are limited to the behavior of the past year. The scale has a total possible score of 50 points and a range of 10 to 50. Although the scale appears to have face validity, however, there is no information about the scale's validity and reliability.

Procedure

The measures were provided in a package administered to participants individually. Researchers met with parents and children individually. They were asked to complete the questionnaires during the interview.

All subjects signed a consent form stating that they agreed to participate in the research. These forms were available in Spanish and English. Each subject was provided the opportunity to withdraw his/her participation after being advised of the purpose of the research.

To maintain the confidentiality of the subjects, each package was numbered. Subjects were referred to by numbers, not by names.

Results

We examined Pearson Product Moment Correlation between delinquency scores and variables such as parent's level of acculturation, child's level of acculturation, and cultural disparity. No significant correlation was found. More specifically, we found a weak negative correlation $r = -.1475$ ($p > .05$), between acculturation disparity and reported level of delinquency. We also found a weak negative correlation $r = -.0506$ ($p > .05$) between the child's level of acculturation and their reported delinquency score. On the other hand, the research revealed a weak positive correlation $r = .1058$ ($p > 7.05$) between the parent's level of acculturation and the child's reported level of delinquency, and a weak positive correlation $r = .2657$

($p < .05$)between the parents years in the United States and the child's reported level of delinquency.

Discussion

Our results show there was no significant correlation between the level of delinquency of subjects and cultural disparity across generations. It was found that males tend to score significantly higher in the delinquency scale than females. However, this was to be expected.

We expected to find a significant correlation between the level of delinquency of subjects and cultural disparity. Unfortunately, our feeling about the nature and effect of cultural disparity was not supported. We believe that as a result of acculturation requirements, Latino adolescents experience a generational gap, which is presumed to be larger and more stressful than for non-Latino adolescents. These added stresses, which result from the differences between levels of acculturation across generations, interfere with normal adolescent development and contribute to the adolescent's increased involvement in delinquent behavior. The expected elevated level of delinquency was theorized to result from the experience of alienation from the culture of origin, the adapted culture, and the family systems. As adolescents identify with the adapted culture, they separate from their culture of origin and are alienated by their families, which continue to embrace the culture of origin. These adolescents find themselves without the support of family or community as they fail to be fully accepted into the adapted

culture.

Tolan (1988) argued that the functioning of the family system serves to identify delinquency. As such, the turmoil of adolescence is heightened by the individual's and family's interaction with the process of acculturation. The feelings of isolation from the family, the culture of origin, and the adapted culture leaves adolescents looking for a sense of belonging which makes them susceptible to joining adolescent groups. In the Latino, inner-city communities, these groups are often delinquent groups. Also, Sommers, Fagan, and Baskin (1993) found that Familiarism, a measure of the individual's expressed concerns over family values rather than individual opportunities, was a consistent and direct contributor to the avoidance of deviance.

The findings of this study are not conclusive and it may be in the deficiencies of this study that we find both an explanation for these findings and suggestions for future research.

The use of a self-report measure of delinquent behavior is an area of difficulty since self-report measures may promote exaggerations or under reporting.

The unavailability of a standardized measure of delinquency also creates difficulties. We developed a measure of delinquency using information gathered from other self report studies; consequently, at that time, there was no way of verifying if the scale actually measured delinquency. Validity and reliability information on this scale were lacking. Research geared toward

developing a standardized measure of delinquency for this population is needed.

The size of the sample is another area of deficiency for this study. Cultural disparity is a major area of study and one that has been seriously neglected by the available research. The available research (Cooney, Rogler, Hurrell,& Ortiz, 1982) suggests that cultural disparity plays an important role in the process of acculturation. To truly review the importance of cultural disparity and the implications on the process of acculturation, one would need to engage in research that would include a larger sample and a larger geographical area. Such a task is beyond the scope of this project, which was intended to be a pilot study.

Further research to investigate the role played by cultural disparity in the process of acculturation and the development of the Latino adolescent may assist in the development of effective preventive and intervention techniques for this population. The possible benefits of this research make it a crucial area for future investigation.

Finally, the need exists to expand the perception of acculturation and of family. For this study, acculturation is perceived based on the relationship of different cultures with American culture. A challenge for researchers is to expand our definition of acculturation to include cultures coming together in different parts of the world and under different social and political conditions. Acculturation needs to continue to be

defined in terms of the changes in all cultures as a result of merger.

Further research in this area requires that we challenge our beliefs about acculturation, social deviancy, and development. Such research will challenge universal beliefs about adolescent development and psychological theory; understanding that such theory was developed within a specific socio-economical context and may not be generalized to others.

The role of family is different across cultures and countries. Such differences need to be considered when studying the family's effects on psychological factors. The assumptions made based on the experience of the American culture have limited applications among other cultures.

REFERENCES

Amaro, H., Whitaker, R., Coleman, G., Herrin, T. (1990). Acculturation and marijuana and cocaine use: Finding from HHANES 1982-1984. American Journal of Public Health, 80, 1-7

Barrett, M.E., Joe, G.W., & Simpson, D.W. (1991). Acculturation influences on inhalant use: Special Issue. Inhalant use by Mexican American youth: Findings from a longitudinal study. Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences,13(3), 276-296.

Block, C. R. (1991). Lethal violence in the Chicago Latino community. Statistical Analysis Center, Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority.

Buriel, R., Calzada, S., & Vasquez, R. (1982). The relationship of traditional Mexican American culture to adjustment and delinquency among three generations of Mexican American male adolescents. Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences,4,41-55.

Caetano,R. (1987). Acculturation and drinking patterns among U.S. Hispanics. British Journal of Addiction,82, 789-799.

Caetano, R., & Medina-Mora, M. E. (1988). Acculturation and drinking among people of Mexican descent in Mexico and the United States. Journal of Studies on Alcohol, 49, 462-471.

Cooney, R.S., Rogler, L.H., Hurrell, R.M., & Ortiz, V.(1982). Decision making in intergenerational Puerto Rican families. Journal of Marriage and The Family,44, 621-631.

Fridrich, A. H. & Flannery, D.J. (1995). The effects of ethnicity and acculturation on early adolescent delinquency.

Journal of Child and Family Studies, 4, 69-87.

Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority. (1990). Population and offenders data. Unpublished manuscript

Kleinman,A.,& Good, B.(1985). Culture and depression: Studies in the anthropology and cross-cultural psychiatry of affect and disorder. Berkerly: University of California Press.

Sabogal, F., Marin, G., Sabogal, R.O., Marin, B.V., and Stable, E.J.P. (1987). Hispanic familism and acculturation: What changes and what doesn't? Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences 9, 397-412.

Sommers, I., Fagan, J., & Baskin, D. (1993). Sociocultural influences on the explanation of delinquency for Perto Rican youths. Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences, 15, 36-62.

Tolan, P. (1988). Socioeconomic, family and social stress correlates of adolescent antisocial and delinquent behavior. Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, 16, 317-331.